

## The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

## Part A: General Information

## Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Modern Languages and Culture
Subject(s):	<i>Japanese</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Japanese
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA & MA

## Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to [exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk).

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Academic Quality and Standards**  
Academic Quality and Standards Team  
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building  
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

## Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

**Matters for Urgent Attention**

*If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box*

*I believe that it is totally inappropriate that the minimum marks for an assignment is 20%. Although I only now attend a module exam board, I am concerned that at exam boards where students whole profile of marks are seen, that a student who has scored 38% in a module may receive compensation and have this mark changed to 40%. However, this 38% could be derived from scoring 56% on an essay in the first semester that is worth 50% of the module score. Without attending any classes or exam in the second semester, they would get 20% and the 10% contribution to their overall mark would leave them with 38%. The 20% rule in academically unjustifiable and is unfair on other students. This rule has to go immediately.*

*The mark schedules produced for the exam board need to be improved. There needs to be a notification to show that extenuating circumstances for a student have been noted and that the mark provided has taken account of this as appropriate.*

**Only applicable in first year of appointment**

*Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?*

N/A

**For Examiners completing their term of appointment**

*Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School*

N/A

**1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

I believe that everything has been conducted appropriately and that standards are of the appropriate level.

**2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?**

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

There is no national benchmark as such, but on the whole I would say that the level is comparable to what I would expect at our institution and others.

**3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs**

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

I believe that these are appropriate. However, I am concerned about the way in which Appendices for essays are being handled. I saw one essay which although the main body was 4,000 word, the Appendix was 8,000 words. The essay was given an extraordinarily high mark. I would like to see the word count for the Appendix (but not Bibliography) to be included within all assessments.

I believe the system of taking off marks for a particular number of days late is causing confusion and unnecessary time-consuming activities. I would like to see a system whereby a mark of 0 is recorded for late submission where there are no extenuating circumstances.

I am concerned about the marking schedule for the dissertations. It would appear that the marking and second marking was happening too close to the exam board that I attended which meant that there was little time for the correct dissertations to be seen by myself and it appeared to lead to some confusion about whether the correct marks had been entered on the system, particularly where extenuating circumstances need to be considered.

**4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?**

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

I believe that the students were given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the aims and ILOs. Students are also given a very high level of feedback on their assessments to enable them to make future improvements. Given how time-consuming this process can be, the staff should be commended on their efforts to help students in this way.

**5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum**

N/A

**6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year**

*It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.*

This year there was further improvements in the design of exam papers so that there is greater consistency in fonts, consistency in the usage of macrons, and improvements in how vocabulary lists are presented. I hope that these areas will continue to be looked at to ensure that the appropriate standards are adhered to. I would like to see further attention given to trying to improve the quality of the scanned Japanese scripts in exam papers as the quality is not always that good – the fonts are sometimes small and not aligned well.

**7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching**

*This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.*

Based on my knowledge of some of the staff at the centre, I can see evidence of research-led teaching in a number of the modules.

**For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements**

**8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements**

N/A

**9. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.**

- *Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Yes, but given the apparent change in rules regarding the 20% rule noted above, I am surprised that a clear memo about this was not provided. I am concerned that this may not even have been provided and fully understood by all staff based on the way marks were reported at the exam board.

**10. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?**

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

As above.

**11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?**

Yes

**12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?**

On the whole, yes. There were some modules where the final mark schedule were not available. It would be useful to have some clearer notification for each assessment saying which ones I am being asked to look at and any other particular issues to consider rather than being left to sort out for myself which ones may need to be looked at.

**13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?**

Yes

**14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?**

No.

I have already commented above about the 20% rule and issues regarding the noting of extenuating circumstances, so I will not repeat that here.

I am also concerned that I was asked to sign sheets for Year 1 modules, although I have seen no sight of these. All I was signing on the basis of was whether one person could read out names and marks from one list and that these were the same on another list. Is this really an appropriate use of time?

I am surprised that I am the one looking at assessments for MA Japanese language modules but I have no input into the Exam Board where these modules are considered.

The new process of having external attend the internal module exam board is generally an improvement, but the idea of having at least one external attend the other exam board is not. In the days of video conferencing, etc., there must surely be a better means of this operation so as to reduce the unnecessary time burdens on external and costs of the University.

I am concerned that two cases where plagiarism were being considered still came before the board, meaning that I could not sign the sheet at the time. Clearly the processes and how the mark sheets are drawn up needs to be looked at.

There were some problems where the order of names used by staff to call out their marks, did not match up with the order of the exam board sheet. Perhaps it would be better for Student Numbers to be used as this should lead to greater consistency in order as well as ensure that the board is acting appropriately with regard to student identity.

It appeared that there was at least one module that had multiple elements contributing to a single mark being returned on the system (e.g. there may be 3 elements where the student scored 5%, 10% and 10%, but this is just entered as 25%) – where this is the case, care needs to be taken to ensure that the staff know how the marks have been entered so that the marks can be confirmed. This becomes particularly relevant in relation to the application of the 20% rule.

Internals need to ensure that they have the print out of the marks that are on the system and that they have checked these prior to the exam board also. Too many mark sheets needed to be printed during the meeting and in some cases staff were checking the actual assessment itself.

Where examiners are unable to attend, it needs to be clear who will be speaking to their module's marks.

Consideration needs to be given to how best schedule the exam board. Had the external for Chinese also been available, the meeting would have been very long – but other than the dissertation module(s), there seems little need for 3 externals be in attendance for all of the time.

**15. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?**

This has been discussed elsewhere.

**Other comments**

**Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form**

A system whereby the University can withdraw students from a module through lack of engagement needs to be introduced. At present students remain enrolled to give them the option of their three attempts. It would be better to have the option to withdraw them, but give the student the means to appeal this should they still wish to make another attempt.

**School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT**

**17 December 2012**

**SMLC Response to External Examiner's Report**

Dear <>,

Following our recent correspondence about the 2013 School of Modern Languages and Cultures classification board and the concerns you expressed about the response to your 2012 External Examiner's report, I would like to respond in more detail to the points in your report relating to School-level procedures. Specifically, I am responding to 'matters for urgent attention' (1 and 2 below) and to section 14 in the report (administrative arrangements).

1. The University's 20-90 marking scale: The School of Modern Languages and Cultures is not in a position to change the institutional marking scale, but we do take your comments about the implementation of this scale very seriously and have forwarded these to the head of the Academic Quality and Standards Team. <> will be in touch with you directly in due course.
2. Highlighting mitigating / extenuating circumstances: Under 'matters for urgent attention' you also noted the need to highlight on the mark sheets cases where mitigating circumstances have been taken into account. As may have been explained to you at the EAST module board in June 2012, mitigating circumstances are considered separately at a School 'Special Cases Committee' and recommendations are forwarded to the relevant subject area module boards and / or the final classification board (for final year students) or progress board (for level 1 and 2 students). Mitigating circumstances only need to be mentioned at the module board such as the one you attended if the Special Cases Committee has recommended changes to marks. It is, of course, important that this information is communicated clearly between the boards and we will look at ways to ensure that this happens as efficiently and transparently as possible this year.
3. Level 1 mark sheets: I also note your concerns about being asked to sign off level 1 mark sheets without having seen level 1 work. The University does not require externals to look at level 1 work, although you are, of course, welcome to request to see examples of this work. The official mark sheets produced by the University do, however, require the signature of an external examiner. This is to confirm that the marks have been approved at the appropriate exam board. I will, however, raise your concern with the University's Taught Student Administration which produces these mark sheets.
4. New arrangements for the SMLC module boards and classification boards: I do appreciate that inviting external examiners to attend the University twice in as many weeks may appear to be a less than efficient use of time and money. However, it is very important to us to have external examiners physically present at both boards. The module boards at subject level provide the opportunity for external examiners to discuss the academic content and the assessment and marking of work in that subject area, and this input is vital in maintaining and enhancing the quality of our academic provision. At the classification board, the role of the external examiners present is to oversee and ratify our procedures, to contribute to discussion of students who fall in the discretionary band between degree classifications and those with serious mitigating circumstances affecting their classification, and to sign the classification sheets. While some of the discussion could perhaps be carried out by video conference or similar means, it would be impossible to arrange for

classification sheets to be signed remotely in time for classifications to be returned to Taught Student Administration before the release of results to students in time for graduation. We are a large School and classify several hundred students over the 2 days of the classification board. We do appreciate that we are now asking more of our externals, but we will ensure that each external examiner is only asked to attend the classification board once during his / her tenure. The external examiners present at the 2012 classification board were happy with the new arrangements and procedures.

5. Involvement in the Japanese language modules for the MA programme: As with a number of other MA programmes in the School, there is a dedicated external examiner for MA programmes in East Asian Studies, who attends the classification board in October and ratifies procedures in a similar way to the externals in attendance at the undergraduate board outlined above. At modular level, however, we still require the specialist input of the external examiner with expertise in the relevant subject area and language. This is why you were asked to look at MA work but not to attend the MA board. I apologise if these arrangements were not clear and would like to reassure you that we are in the process of putting together an information pack for all external examiners in the School which will explain precisely these kinds of arrangements.
6. Module mark sheets: It appears that there were a few issues regarding clarity of information in the module mark sheets and discrepancies between the information on the sheets and the information held by module leaders. We have made some changes to the module mark sheets this year and will make a further concerted effort to ensure that all module leaders across are using the official mark sheets rather than their own versions. I hope that this will solve the problems encountered last year.

I hope that this addresses some of the concerns you have about our procedures. If you would like to discuss any of the above further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With very best wishes,

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(SMLC Exams and Assessment Tutor)